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Confederation, Colonialism, and Post-Colonialism: The Dispossession of Mi'kmaw Lands in Western Newfoundland

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Abstract

Upon entering the St. George's Bay and Port au Port Bay area, one is likely to encounter evidence of Aboriginality. Aboriginal culture is something that is embraced and celebrated in many areas of Newfoundland, particularly on the West Coast. Through the forces of confederation, colonialism, and post colonialism, forceful assimilation threatened to eradicate the Mi'kmaq cultural life from the island. As an historical analysis of the St. George's Bay and Port au Port Bay Mi'kmaq populations, with reference to the theoretical frameworks of John H. Bodley and Richard R. Wilk, this research aims to show hegemonic forces, such as the British, American, Canadian and Newfoundland governments, directly contributed to the physical displacement of Aboriginal peoples which actively disadvantaged the Mi'kmaq people by further removing them from their identity.

It was the government that, the government of Newfoundland, just took the land and gave it to [the Americans]—this is where the Trans Canada runs through [the town of Stephenville] ... [T]hey took it, and our barn was on one side of the highway and then our house was on the other, you know? They just moved in, and back then I guess, by, in times of war and stuff like that, they just moved in and took it over and that was it, right?

- Personal Interview, 2015.

Introduction

Growing up on the Port au Port Peninsula in Western Newfoundland, Aboriginality was more than an ambiguous topic. It was not explained to our generation that our community was also an Aboriginal community, with a very distinct and important history – a fact that was also disregarded within school curricula. My parents did their best to explain to me that my father's family is Mi'kmaq; they would bring me to "the land" and show me where my ancestors used to plant, log, and rear horses. It is an area of wilderness spanning approximately 90 acres, located on the far-west side of the town of Stephenville, bordering Romain's River. My father would explain that while he still logged wood for the winter in today's society it was easier to buy what is needed rather than to plant, raise, or harvest it. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the shift towards a market economy after confederation promoted the notion that financial security is a primary means of survival, the adoption of which left less time for planting, harvesting and farming for one's own needs. Despite the generational pull away from agricultural living, my parents always spoke of returning to the land once they retired and could afford the time, money, and effort that went into the reclamation of their heritage.

In July of 2013, my father, who regularly inspects our family's property in Stephenville, noticed that someone had been trespassing on our ancestral land and

causing damage by cutting trees within the property line. Upon approaching the Town Council in Stephenville to inquire into activities on his land he learned that the town had planned to establish a “live hand-gun range” as part of a joint-program with the Canadian Military, claiming ignorance towards any other claims to property ownership in the area. Subsequently, my family presented documents and bills of sale dating back to the early twentieth century, proving that with the exception of the past 7 years, the land in question was indeed owned and worked by local Aboriginal families. Months went by without word, and then a phone call from the Provincial Government posed a new challenge: They threatened to expropriate the land. According to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, the land had not been used for a total of 15 to 20 years, as logging and other “minimal” usage were not considered effective forms of land management (Personal Interview, 1, 2015). The reason for provincial acquisition of said property was so that the Town of Stephenville wished to expand its limits and develop a sub-division. However, upon producing legal documentation, the government has ceased in contacting my family since the fall of 2015. Together, the actions of the provincial and municipal governments work to undermine Aboriginal presence in the area, the relationship of such groups to their land and how land constitutes a part of Aboriginal identity. Such political entities forcefully displace Aboriginal peoples, contributing to assimilation, loss of culture, heritage, and identity, via the wrongful seizure of property. This is how I became interested in the impacts of colonialism on Aboriginal peoples residing in the St. George’s Bay and Port au Port Bay areas. Here, I examine Newfoundland and Labrador’s confederation with Canada, the establishment of the Harmon Air Force Base in Stephenville, and the formation of the Qalipu Mi’kmaq First Nation Band (hereafter Qalipu First Nation) in reference to theoretical frameworks of colonialism and post-colonialism as put forth by John H. Bodley, and Jean M. O’Brien. Both theorists, as well as other scholars, concur that the displacement and dispossession of Aboriginals and Aboriginal land has stood to have severe consequences for past, present, and future generations.

Confederation, for many people, was, and still is, the ultimate cause of assimilation for many Mi’kmaq. Many of the participants involved in my research felt that confederation was responsible for decades of forced assimilation and displacement, resulting in the evanescence of Mi’kmaq society and culture. The major factor here is the complete oversight of Aboriginal culture in Newfoundland at the time of confederation; this is echoed by such scholars as David Mackenzie who argue that,

Newfoundland’s native policy was essentially one of neglect based on ignorance...The ultimate goal of Canada’s policy was assimilation and it was to be achieved through the enfranchisement of the native peoples. (Mackenzie 163)

With confederation came drastic changes to hunting and fishing territories as well as the formalization of property rights (Tulk 11-2), perhaps the most drastic measure to affect Mi’kmaq cultural identity on the island.

Scholars like Angela Robinson state that neglect of the province’s Aboriginal peoples stems back to the early 18th and 19th centuries, where with the impacts of colonialism, “Aboriginals soon found themselves transformed from an independent

peoples...to refugees in their own land” (Robinson 386). Systemic and incessant colonial practices began prior to Newfoundland and Labrador’s confederation with Canada in 1949, with the legislation such as *the Leased Bases Agreement* formalized through agreements between the US and British governments (Neary 2001). The United States leased large areas of land for the establishment of military bases as a means to further defend the Western hemisphere during the Second World War (Neary 1). Stephenville, located within the St. George’s Bay vicinity, was one of these designated areas (Neary 1). Aboriginal families that had resided on the land where the base was built were ultimately pushed aside and given a monetary lump sum for their property (Personal Interview, 2, 2015; Neary 2001; Robinson 2013;).

It can be argued that the establishment of the Harmon Air Force Base (hereafter HAFB) in Stephenville Newfoundland is one of the first instances of the dispossession and expropriation of Aboriginal lands on Newfoundland’s West Coast. From this the impacts of Confederation, as previously discussed, as well as post-colonial influences would continue with violations against Aboriginal peoples. The development of the Qalipu First Nation promised attempts at reclaiming Aboriginal heritage, culture and identity in the region. However, problems still persist as even though formal recognition under the federal *Indian Act* was attained in 2011, Aboriginal peoples were forced to sign away their claims to land as a means to acquire formal recognition (www.Qalipu.ca: *Amendment to Agreement*, 2011). While it can be argued that Newfoundland is past the point of ‘traditional’ land claims in terms of, the establishment of a reservation, it should be noted that there are Mi’kmaq families in this region who have owned and resided on property extending back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus, the Qalipu First Nation agreement can be said to directly disadvantage these individuals, as it offers no protection against wrongful dispossession, displacement, or expropriation. It can also be argued that under the existing agreement Aboriginal peoples will be further disadvantaged as “Qalipu Band self-determination will be eclipsed by the state”(Robinson 383) since federal agents ultimately determine that, “all rights to lands and resources are to be forfeited” (Robinson 383).

In order to give substance to the argument that the dispossession and expropriation of lands is detrimental to Aboriginal cultural survival, the above stated occurrences throughout Newfoundland’s history will be examined in reference to themes of colonialism and post-colonialism as outlined and described by Bodley and O’Brien. Accordingly, colonialism and post-colonialism will be used as interpretive frameworks in order to illustrate how such political processes affected, and continue to affect, the Mi’kmaq peoples of Western Newfoundland. In terms of colonialism, this will refer to “the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically” (Oxford Online Dictionary). Post-colonialism, on the other hand, will refer to the societal and cultural responses—including discrepancies—to imposed Western rule and/or legislation (Lutfi 39). Furthermore, this analysis will include notions referring to various hegemonic forces, or the dominating socio-political structures that organize and influence a society (Oxford Online Dictionary), and how they have contributed to the disadvantage of the province’s Aboriginal Peoples.

Methodology

The research question generated through scholarly literature review, as well as participant interviews, is as follows: Does the application of historical and recent state policies result in the present-day displacement of Mi'kmaq Peoples? Prior to conducting the interviews, local newspaper articles, social media sites, and official government and Band websites such as www.Qalipu.ca and www.gov.nf.ca were consulted. As the information analyzed began to yield certain themes, theoretical frameworks could then be used to explain and describe these themes in relation to their historical and theoretical contexts.

Originating from the Port au Port Peninsula, and being a member of both the Port au Port Indian Band, and Qalipu First Nation, finding participants for my research was not a difficult task. The only issue encountered in this regard was that the most significant aspect of my research, the interviews, were taking place during the end of February and March, two of the stormiest months of the year in Newfoundland. To combat this problem, many interviews were conducted over the phone as well as through the social media program, Skype, which would allow for face-to-face communication in real time. The interviews themselves were semi-structured, as to ensure that key issues for respondents would be accommodated. Primarily, participants were chosen based on their involvement with Qalipu First Nation and second as self-identifying as Aboriginal. The 'snowball' effect was used during the recruitment of participants, which proved to be quite effective. Information was gathered on Mi'kmaq participants' opinions regarding the historical occurrences of Confederation, the establishment of the Harmon Air Force Base, and finally the implementation and development of the Qalipu First Nation. This information was then viewed in relation to the impacts on Aboriginal culture and history, and with reference to the historical and present-day displacement of Aboriginal peoples and the dispossession of Aboriginal lands.

As previously stated, the interviews—six in total—were conducted during February and March of 2015, within the Bay of Islands/Corner Brook region with participants located, and/or originating from, the St. George's Bay and Port au Port Bay vicinities. One of the six participants was chosen due to the fact that they are a pre-confederate Aboriginal, and was able to provide detailed information regarding the effects of confederation and the Harmon Air Force Base on local Aboriginal populations. A second participant was chosen, as they are a member of the Qalipu First Nation Council and as well as chief of another band on the Port Au Port Peninsula who was able to provide insight into the possibility of future land claims, and how the formation of Qalipu First Nation has stood to impact local Aboriginal populations. The other four participants, who are members of Qalipu First Nation, were asked to participate as a means to generate conceptions and opinions about the Band, itself, in order to place the data within relevant local and historical contexts.

Ethics

Participants were presented with an informed consent form which outlined the research and research methodology as well as the various rights of the participant, such as the right to remain nameless or to withdraw from the research at anytime. Also contact information for myself as well as my senior supervisor was provided along with a brief overview of the interview process. A copy of the consent form was also given to participants for their own records.

One ethical issue that was discovered during my research was that of personal bias. Being Aboriginal and from the area of which I am researching, my emic perceptions of the issue of displacement may not resemble that of an outsider. However, my position yielded some benefit as I knew my participants well, thus I was privy to certain types of information that participants may not have shared openly with immediate acquaintances.

A second issue that arose was that of leading questions. When developing ideas and conceptions for interview questions, I found it was often hard to inquire on a topic without first providing context. This became increasingly difficult as my own opinions on the matter were not to be alluded to. Some informants seemed intimidated, especially when asked about the Qalipu First Nation, as they felt they did not know enough about the topic to answer questions. This was dealt with by assuring participants that they were not being tested, but rather the interview was based on a matter of opinion, which would, if requested, remain completely confidential and represented with a correct portrayal of their opinions. The interview process, itself remained largely unchanged, except for the fact that as the researcher, I, myself, had to become more aware of how I framed my questions, I also had to be sure to direct them in a manner that was intelligible to a wide array of personalities.

Literature Review

John H. Bodley is a Regents Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Oregon University, specializing in research relating to Indigenous Peoples, cultural ecology, and contemporary issues (Washington State University Website, 2015). In his book, *Victims of Progress* (2015), Bodley outlines various theoretical frameworks that are employed in this research which serve to illustrate how historical and recent state policies have resulted—and continue to result—in the present-day displacement of Western Newfoundland Mi'kmaw populations.

Bodley states that since the previous publication of this work in 2008, it has become evident that almost all Indigenous populations, even the most isolated, have been effected by the processes of global warming, globalization and Westernized 'progress' (Bodley ix). The author examines the effects of increasingly globalized commercialization and Western colonialism from the 1800s through to the 1970s. Bodley maintains that,

[u]ntil the rise of Indigenous political organizations in the 1970s, government policies and attitudes were the basic determinants of the fate of small-scale tribal societies. [Governments] throughout the

world were—and still are—most concerned about the increasingly efficient exploitation of human and natural resources (Bodley, x).

Since 1970, many Aboriginal groups have become organized as a means to reclaim their identities, speak out against centuries of oppression, and to stop the destruction of their lands for economic gain (Bodley 200). Bodley asserts that everyone on the planet is, and has the potential to be, a victim of progress (Bodley xi). This is avowed by the fact that Western “progress” is an insurmountable force that affects populations on a global scale (Bodley xi). Capitalistic progress also tends to be transient, with some sectors benefiting, like that of the upper class elite, Canadian oil tycoons, or even the federal, provincial, and municipal governments, to the inevitable detriment of others groups and sectors (Bodley x).

This notorious political conflict between Indigenous Peoples and impinging societies has been on going for over 6000 years (Bodley 1). Bodley argues that, until the beginning of the Industrial Revolution—barely 200 years ago—[Aboriginal Peoples] still effectively controlled much of the world. Conquest through colonization by commercially organized societies destroyed millions of indigenous peoples and countless cultural groups. Most surviving indigenous groups lost their political independence and now only have precarious control over their resources (Bodley 1)

1970 colonialist history viewed Aboriginal peoples as a ‘dying breed’—such claims actually accelerated cultural destruction rather than acting to preserve it—and while some colonizers may have sympathized with the concerns of such populations, the practices of such colonialist hegemonic forces would not be altered in accordance with desires of Aboriginal cultural determination and autonomy (Bodley 2).

Increased capitalism, beginning in with the Industrial Revolution, has developed doctrines of commercialization, which, according to Bodley, have “surpassed both humanization and politicization as dominant cultural processes in the world” (Bodley 7). He maintains that,

the real problem facing indigenous peoples is that their cultural heritage of community-level resource management, high levels of local self-sufficiency, and relative social equality are the antithesis of how the commercial world was developed and is currently organized. (Bodley 7)

With increased governmental power came the formalization of colonialist conquest to ensure the secure ‘placement’ and ‘preservation’ of Aboriginal Peoples (Bodley 7): “[G]overnments devised systems of *indirect control* to ease the impact of control” (Bodley 75). Ultimately, ruling administrations aspired to assimilate populations and prevent coercion wherever possible, thus promoting economic advances (Bodley 89). For instance, Bodley states that the British largely employed the use of *indirect control* during the twentieth century, especially with expansion during World War II, as a

means to avoid social disruption amongst localities within which they became the newly instated government (Bodley 89). While the formation of Indigenous societies and groups was encouraged, they were also faced with “specific limits on their authority” (Bodley 89). Essentially, this form of control, that still persists to this day, is and was intended to assimilate Indigenous Peoples into the “traditional political system” (Bodley 90) proposed by the state, which to be achieved as discreetly as possible (Bodley 90).

Bodley suggests that, the “extension of government control marks a highly significant event in the history of any tribal society because it means that at this point the society ceases being politically autonomous” (Bodley 87). Bodley maintains that the most detrimental policies to Indigenous sociocultural lifeways involve the tenure of land (Bodley 87). As a means of controlling Indigenous populations, hegemonic forces have organized Aboriginal populations via land policies—for example, treaties of reservations—in order to ensure extraction of valuable resources for economic gain. Land laws are often complicated and fairly ambiguous, with legislates often basing land rights on contingencies such as traditional use of the land, how it may benefit future members of the Indigenous population, whether or not it is occupied or used at any given point in time and finally, whether or not the land was officially registered with a government institution (Bodley 99).

Post-colonialist practices have emerged in response to such restrictive and intrusive legislation. Bodley suggests that in the twenty-first century, social media, and other forms of communication have greatly improved the mobilization of Indigenous Peoples in regards to gaining formal recognition and political autonomy. However, politically autonomous societies, such as those existing before the impact of Westernization, may never be attainable, “[t]oday indigenous peoples are designing political structures that permit the consolidation of a power base to successfully confront states without sacrificing their egalitarian and communal characteristics... [However]... they must win allies in the dominant society and even internationally” if they hope to compete with ruling governments (Bodley 201).

Ultimately, Bodley declares that Western European colonialism and colonization has stood to be significant factors regarding the displacement and assimilation of Aboriginal peoples. Due to a lack of control over cultural and historical resources—which may be directly linked to a loss of autonomy—as Aboriginal groups are unable to compete with other forms of power. This is due to the fact, as stated by Bodley, that many Aboriginal groups are held by a formal contract that severely limits their autonomy and rights to historical land. Bodley states that even since the 16th century, small indigenous groups recognized that “sovereignty would need to be transferred to the state by conquest or by treaty” (Bodley 78) if they were to survive within the dominating social regime. Essentially, “[t]reaties with Aboriginal [groups]...are made for the purpose of arranging the terms of the [assumed] guardianship to be exercised over the tribe” (Bodley 78). In other words, such legislation as treaties stand in contradiction to Aboriginal lifeways; such formalities directly disadvantage aboriginal groups by limiting their autonomy and by removing them or limiting their access to their cultural resources (Bodley 79). Thus the acquisition and preservation of land is central to the preservation of Aboriginal lifeways as Aboriginal identity and culture are rooted to specific geographic locals

(Bodley 98). Aboriginal resources and land not only hold the historical and cultural knowledge, but can also a source of economical and political power within Western-European societies (Bodley 237). For instance, petroleum is an extremely valuable resource of the 21st century and is “the critical foundation of the global commercial system as [it is] presently structured” (Bodley 236). In saying that,

[s]ince 1950 [petroleum-dependant] cultural transformations [have] vastly accelerated global population growth and dramatically increased outside pressure on [Aboriginal] territories and resources. (Bodley 236).

This encroachment and removal of such said resources acts as a substantial threat to Aboriginal culture and identity. As Bodley exclaims,

[a]side from its obvious economic significance, the land itself often holds important symbolic and emotional meaning for [I]ndigenous [P]eoples as the repository for ancestral remains, clan origin points, and other sacred features in tribal mythology. For [I]ndigenous [P]eople, “land” really means “territory”. It is about access to land, and water, and all other natural resources (Bodley 98).

Therefore, the removal of such resources and the resulting environmental degradation which ensues—such as the development of the Albertan tar sands—, resembles the cultural damage that has occurred as a result of such practices (Bodley 246). It can also be argued that such expropriation and/ or domination of resources via Western hegemonic forces works to undermine Indigenous Peoples’ intrinsic human right to their cultural preservation and development (Bodley 201). While Bodley focuses on tribal populations, many of his observations can be applied broadly to the experiences of other Aboriginal groups. For instance, the historical and present-day realities of the Newfoundland Mi’kmaq bear resemblance to the descriptions and case studies found in Bodley’s work.

Jean M. O’Brien’s, *Dispossession by Degrees: Indian Land and Identity in Natick Massachusetts, 1650-1790* (1997), focuses on the struggles of the Natick against the forces of colonialism, and the resulting assimilation via the dispossession of their lands. O’Brien’s work occupies much the same space in reference to her philosophies and in the agreement that colonialism and the practices and actions that stemmed from such have had serious and detrimental effects on Aboriginal peoples. In effect, many of the “Eurocentric ideologies and philosophies” that resulted from colonial and post-colonial ideologies forcefully “subverted and radicalized traditions and lifeways—[And, in some cases, accompanying government policies resulted] in the outright denial of [Aboriginal peoples]” (Robinson 383-4).

In the 19th century, conceptions of Indigenous Peoples were generated from a position of historical ideological romanticism, that, according to O’Brien,

[justified forcibly] removing Aboriginal Peoples from native homelands to protect them from frontiersmen they refused to restrain

who lawlessly encroached on [Aboriginal] lands and jeopardized [Aboriginal] survival. (O'Brien 3)

Such paternalistic acclimations of 'protection' and 'guidance' only stood to further injustices against Aboriginal peoples who survived and thrived long before they were colonized. O'Brien noted that combating Euro-American notions of the "*vanishing Indian*" (O'Brien 3) was a form of resistance against colonial powers in an attempt to live within a newly founded system: "Survival into the present, not extinction in the remote and distant past, is the appropriate narrative for New England [Aboriginal] history" (O'Brien 4).

The Natick had a mobile economy; but with the arrival of Europeans this mobility was compromised. Unable to fish and hunt and gather and engage in cultural lifeways as they did, prior to the upheaval that accompanied European contact generated one of the main points of contention between the Natick and their colonizers (O'Brien 11). Euro-Americans viewed the lands from a purely pragmatic perspective; they saw the equitable use of communal resources as being shared among the larger population (O'Brien 11).

However, Aboriginal notions towards land and nature varied considerably from the English; the Natick viewed the land as their provider and thus was a determining factor of their very identity. Its destruction would undermine and drastically alter Aboriginal lifeways on a broad scale (O'Brien 11). The central foci of O'Brien's study is the metamorphosis of land; the conflict over its possession and "proper" use, how people viewed the connection between land and their identities, and how the land stands to mark the very existence and 'place' of Aboriginal Peoples (O'Brien 10).

Colonizers and colonialists were initially drawn to New England due to its abundance and availability of natural resources (O'Brien 14); a fact that drew Europeans to settle in other parts of the world. Pre-contact Natick peoples hunted, fished, grew and gathered what they needed for yearly subsistence. In the Spring, Summer, and Fall, they would smoke and dry their foods and prepare for the Winter (O'Brien 18). During the winter groups would break into smaller factions and venture away from the main camp, congregating once again in late December (O'Brien 18). According to O'Brien, this mobile Indigenous economy allowed for the procurement of food all year long, especially during the winter months where scarcity was common (O'Brien 18). As a result, basic land ownership, as well as ownership practices, themselves, were drastically different from that of Europeans (O'Brien 18). While colonizers viewed proprietary rights through heredity and the individual purchase, the Natick practiced collective ownership and only posed ownership over their own creations: "They owed the things they crafted" (O'Brien 18-19). Europeans, however, attributed mobility and dispersive practices to economic instability:

[The English] imposed their notions about property rights upon the landscape, bounded land differently, turned it and its products into commodities, altered its ecological uses and eventually linked it to a new Atlantic economy driven by the market. Arrangements about land were under pinned by a legal system that enforced exclusive

ownership, and contained bureaucratic procedures for property transfers and inheritance of property (O'Brien 22).

These changes undoubtedly interfered with the daily life of the Natick. Some members attempted to resist assimilation, while others, wishing to still be members of a functioning community, opted to adopt European practices as a means to aid their own cultural survival (O'Brien 64).

In order to function under this newly imposed Western rule, the Natick, employed adaptive techniques, fusing Aboriginal and English practices. O'Brien states that language was a major point of contention between both parties but even more pressing were,

the negotiations about land...that stemmed from the [Aboriginals'] divided desires, that both magnified crucial divisions within the [Aboriginal] community, and created the fault lines that eventually eroded Aboriginal autonomy by facilitating English landownership in Natick (O'Brien 91).

Movement from community-based land ownership towards that of market-based landownership is ultimately the deciding factor regarding the dispossession of Indigenous land (O'Brien 91). Proprietary bureaucratization ultimately generated the sale of Aboriginal land, to non-Aboriginal constituents, setting the groundwork for gradual dispossession (O'Brien 92).

The amalgamation, as previously stated, of Aboriginal and European practice was done in order survive within the changing social norms, and also to ensure cultural longevity under the best conditions possible (O'Brien 11). O'Brien notes that towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Aboriginal population was virtually invisible to now-established European colonialists (O'Brien 11). The fact that a market economy had emerged in the first place is conclusive evidence of threats to Aboriginality; many opted to use their land in English ways by, "selling off parcels of land, building English-style farms" (O'Brien 126) and purchasing English commodities: "However in doing so they were able to perpetuate their families and retain claim to their place even though they no longer enjoyed exclusive occupancy" (O'Brien 126).

Ultimately, O'Brien claims that via colonialism and the resulting colonization of Natick lead to the assimilation of Indigenous populations, and that claims of "extinction" undermine the sociocultural and political struggle endured by the Natick. As the author notes, even historical documents stopped recording Aboriginality by the end of the 18th century, contributing to this gradual 'erasure' (O'Brien 127). Due to the mobile nature of the Natick, land claims were ambiguous, and they soon found themselves surrounded and absorbed, by and into, Western European culture (O'Brien 127). The emergence of a market economy would lead to gradual dispossession of land that would shift lifeways of the Natick and even discourage some from using the land they rightfully owned as a result. This directly constitutes explanations for myths of the "extinction" of Natick Aboriginals as put forth during the late eighteenth century (O'Brien 167); in reality, Western forces bent on economic gain, expansion,

and exploitation, gradually destroyed and consumed Indigenous culture, identity and, over time, life itself.

Brief History of the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq

Newfoundland and Labrador settlement history begins approximately 9000BP with small groups of Amerindian people moving northeast from the St. Lawrence Gulf and the Maritime Provinces into the Strait of Belle Isle...following the retreat of the last glaciation (Kristjánsson et al.,168).

In more recent history, the pre-contact Algonquin ancestors of these prehistoric groups, the Mi'kmaq of Eastern Canada, were also peripatetic groups who extensively travelled throughout “Mi'kma'ki (traditional territory)” (Robinson, 384). The impact of European colonization and colonialism on Mi'kmaq groups was—and still is—extensive, and irreversible; for instance, areas once used by Mi'kmaw Peoples to hunt and fish were overtaken by Europeans wishing to exploit the resources for economic benefit (Robinson 384-5). Colonization and colonialist conquest were spurred by the abundance and need to avail of cod fish resources (Baker 4). While various nations reaped the benefits of the Island and its surrounding waters, no one nation claimed rule over its inhabitants.

In 1824 Newfoundland was recognized as an official “British Colony by Imperial legislation” (Baker 6), and by 1832 it was appointed a Representative Government “consisting of an appointed Legislative Council and an elect House of Assembly” (Baker 6). Legislation would stand to etiolate sociocultural and historical lifeways of not only the Island's Aboriginal peoples but also, in time, the entirety of rural localities; Aboriginals were simply the first to experience the effects of imposed colonialism and forced assimilation (Alfred 2009), possibly due, at least in part, to their status as a so-called, ‘visible minority’.

Government documentation states that by 1901, “Newfoundland's population was approximately 220,000 (4,000 of them in Labrador) living in 1,200 communities” (Baker 10). Not surprisingly, even today while reviewing historical records there is little mention of island's Indigenous populations from the early 18th and 19th centuries. Robinson (2014) accurately attributes this to “British imperial policy and [the implementation of] responsible government, which remained intact in Newfoundland and Labrador until 1949” (Robinson 384) – a government that blatantly ignored the presence of the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq. The movement towards ‘modernization’ meant increasing legislative control over property, and the establishment of various government institutions and programs promoting ‘development’; this in turn caused the province to accumulate a substantial amount of debt via subsidies given by both the British and Canadian governments (Baker 13). Thus in 1933, to “examine the future of Newfoundland and in particular on the financial situation and the prospects therein” (Baker 13), The Royal Commission recommended that the Newfoundland Constitution be suspended and that Newfoundland be administered by a British-appointed commission until it was self-supporting again (Baker 13).

In 1940-41 Newfoundland, under British control, entered into a *Leased Bases Agreement* with the United States. In principle, the US was to supply Britain with naval reinforcements as a World War II aid, in exchange for the permission to lease land for 99 years to further protect the Western hemisphere from possible Nazi invasion (Neary 491-2). The Leased Bases Agreement, signed on March 27, 1941 between British and American officials granted the United States the following:

All the rights, power and authority within the leased areas necessary to establish, operate and defend military bases; Jurisdiction over all people, including Newfoundlanders and other British subjects, committing military offenses inside the leased areas and over non-British subjects committing such offenses outside those areas; The right to acquire additional areas as necessary for the use and protection of the bases. (Higgins 2006; Neary, 500)

Robinson (2014) concurs that the establishment of the HAFB in Stephenville—a town located within the St. Georges Bay and Port au Port Bay area—is one instance of the dispossession and displacement of Aboriginal peoples in the region. However, with its development came jobs and further economic advancements for the town, as well as other areas where American military bases were established, such as St. John's and Argentina (Neary 2001).

Unable to support itself by Western economic standards, Newfoundland displayed deteriorating living conditions within rural localities prior to confederation in 1949 (Bill 2009). Joseph R. Smallwood, the first Premier of Newfoundland, would sign a declaration of confederation with Canada as a means to alleviate and modernize the province during a dense economic depression (Bill 1). It can be assumed that with the increased economic attractiveness due to the establishment of American infrastructure, Newfoundland was now appealing to Canadian officials (Neary, Baker, 2003: 39). “Complicating the [movement were] strong political sentiment[s] in St. John's for greater economic union with the United States” (Baker, 52). However, union with Canada was preferred and as “Peter Neary has observed, the Americans under the 1941 bases deal with the British Government had gotten what they wanted in Newfoundland and went along with British plans for Newfoundland's future constitutional development” (Baker 52).

Predictably there were mixed feelings towards Confederation. Many commentators, like former Premier, Brian Peckford, remember Smallwood for his policy of industrialization, modernization, and rural resettlement, a combination of forces that were seen as “destructive of outport life and folk culture” (Overton 1988, 9)” (Bill, 2009). Arguing against such notions was,

Ed Roberts, long time Smallwood political confidante, [who stated that] Peck-ford's view of Smallwood [was], “Bullshit,” arguing, “there is no question we had to industrialize ... there was nothing new about that. Smallwood had lived hand to mouth in the 1930s and 1940s. He had seen poverty and the appalling living conditions in the outports. But, with Smallwood there was no denying Newfoundland

heritage. At age 70 he went bankrupt producing the Newfoundland encyclopedia (Bill 2009).

However, resettlement programs and improved technologies of the fishery meant that people had to leave their livelihoods for the prospects of a changing economy. Apart from this, upon Confederation Aboriginal Peoples were completely ignored. Scholar David Mackenzie states that, “[p]art of the problem was that in the early years of the Commission of Government there was no government agency responsible for Aboriginal affairs in Newfoundland” (Mackenzie 162). This, coupled with “[t]he disappearance of the large caribou herds and the collapse of the trapping business early in the 20th century destroyed much of the traditional way of life of the Mi’kmaq, and to outsiders they were seen largely to have become Europeanized” (Mackenzie 162). Conceptions as to why Confederation ignored the Indigenous populations differ, however one common thread in academia persists; the decision to neglect and ignore the Mi’kmaq of Newfoundland was to encourage their assimilation through their enfranchisement (Mackenzie 163). According to Mackenzie, the ambiguous, paternalistic Native Policy of Newfoundland was indicative of the future considerations of the Province’s Aboriginal peoples, especially when it came to the dispossession of land and the impacts of said geographic displacement (Mackenzie 164). However, with the absence of a formalized Indian Act Agreement at the time of Confederation, all Newfoundlanders—Mi’kmaq included—were given the right to vote, at least in theory (Tulk 12).

In the years that followed, beginning in the 1970s, Mi’kmaq societies formed as a means to regain their fragmented and disappearing culture (Qalipu.ca). The Federation of Newfoundland Indians (hereafter FNI)—formally Native Association of Newfoundland and Labrador—formed in 1972 with six affiliated bands: Benoit’s Cove First Nations (now named Elmastogoeg), Corner Brook Indian Band, Flat Bay Indian Band, Gander Bay Indian Band, Glenwood Mi’kmaq First Nation, and the Port au Port Indian Band (Qalipu.ca). “FNI’s primary goal [was] to obtain Government of Canada recognition of Mi’kmaq eligibility for registration under the *Indian Act*” (Qalipu.ca), and to promote, secure, and foster the sociocultural and economic well being of the Mi’kmaq of Newfoundland (Qalipu.ca).

For ten years (1972-1982) genealogical data research would be conducted as a means for the population to prove their Mi’kmaq ancestry (Qalipu.ca). By this point, Aboriginal heritage was beginning to recede, with the majority of the St. George’s Bay and Port au Port Bay areas consisting mostly of mixed-ethnicities; the only differences resided in the proximity of Mi’kmaq lineage to the current point in time. In 1978, Conne River, a Mi’kmaq settlement on the Southwest Coast became recognized under their own set of regulations (Mackenzie 1). As Conne River was separate from FNI, “the Federation asked that the Newfoundland Mi’kmaq living outside of Conne River receive the same treatment as those members of the Conne River Band, and, indeed, the same treatment as the other Mi’kmaq in Canada” (Mackenzie 1).

From 1992 until 2006, decades of slow-moving progression would mark the beginning stages of an agreement addressing the Formal recognition of the Mi’kmaq (Qalipu.ca). During this time and moving into 2011 marked a time of, “the conclusion of the first stage of the enrolment process held under the Agreement for the

Recognition of the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band. As of November 30, 2009, close to 25,000 applications had been received and approximately 11,000 have been approved by the Enrolment Committee”(Qalipu.ca). Finally in 2011, the Federal Government of Canada declared the formation of the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band and ultimate federal recognition under the *Indian Act* (Qalipu.ca).

The efforts put forth in the acts of colonialism, confederation, and post colonialism have stood to—and still do—dramatically transform the identities and lifeways of the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq. Through dispossession and displacement of Aboriginal lands, the assimilative processes endured by the Mi'kmaw have caused many groups to redefine their place within the world.

Findings and Discussion

“If you didn't plant your vegetables and do your hunting...and raise your own livestock, you'd starve to death...”

-Personal Interview, 1, 2015

“The Newfoundland Government expropriated their land for the base... and when they went to buy land... the land in the surrounding area had gone up in price...[people] lost their land, their home, and had to start all over again”

-Personal Interview, 2, 2015

European colonization in Newfoundland shows evidence of the dispossession and displacement of the Mi'kmaw peoples, which can be viewed as contributing to the rapid assimilation and loss of cultural identity for Indigenous populations on the island (Robinson 2013; Mackenzie 2010). It became apparent while conducting this research that the initial displacement of Mi'kmaq peoples by formalized hegemonic forces is evident in the launch of the HAFB:

For the Mi'kmaq in Stephenville, the construction of the HAFB had a transformative effect on the on the local populations; it entailed the loss of community and the forfeiture of farmlands and homesteads which were co-opted in the late 1930s (Robinson 388).

Families were relocated from the area and forced to re-establish their lives in a developing commercial economy: One of the participants recalled their family being displaced and their land being dispossessed by the Government of Newfoundland with implementation of the *Leased Bases Agreement*; They abandoned their home and land only to be undercut by the shifting market-economy (Personal Interview 2, 2015). They recalled this by stating,

The Americans came here with the idea of paying Newfoundlanders 'x' number of dollars... The Newfoundland Government weren't satisfied to let the Americans pay that amount of money because

other Newfoundlanders in other areas in Newfoundland weren't getting as high a wage. So the wages that were earned on the [HAFB] weren't as high as they could have been. But the Newfoundland Government allowed that... (Personal Interview 2, 2015).

According to O'Brien, the implementation of a market-economy in the area of Aboriginal inhabitation is often the first step towards, if not the ultimate causation of future dispossession, displacement (O'Brien 92). In light of which land could be acquired in the modern era and distributed individually via kinship or finance systems, rather than through communal ties or bartering as was done in the past (O'Brien 91-2). This also applies to the communal lands of the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq; the economic transition from subsistence to modernity would foster the movement of Mi'kmaq land ownership from that of a kinship-based system to a more individualistic scheme of land ownership. In other words, once the economy of Newfoundland shifted towards that of modernity, the demand for land—for the use of development—increased as well as the number of families who were willing to sell their properties in hopes of some financial security.

There were also instances where land was taken from Aboriginal Peoples without notice or legality, especially if it met the economic needs of the ruling locality. "Stephenville's landscape changed both dramatically and abruptly as hundreds of acres of farmland, many of which had been passed down through generations" (Higgins 2006) was transformed into a military base. As O'Brien noted, for the Natick, the colonialist policies of the English proved to be so intrusive that even day-to-day life for the Natick people was drastically altered. The same theoretical framework applies to the Mi'kmaq of Newfoundland; with the changing countryside came other, more formalized and threatening legal action.

Also in reference to O'Brien, upon retrieving primary documents pertaining to my family's heritage and land ownership in the Stephenville area, it became apparent that dispossession, similar to that experienced by the Natick, was also occurring in and within the St. George's Bay and Port au Port Bay areas over 100 years ago. This dispersion of property directly influenced the assimilation of the Mi'kmaq of Newfoundland in the past and also in the future.

Improved infrastructure of the HAFB, and other economical 'advancements' generated discussions of Confederation, something thought to have been cast to one side as long as the Province had been viewed as an economic burden (Baker 35). Most participants felt as though confederation with Canada offered a "mixed bag" of political pros and cons. On one hand it was argued that Confederation was brought about as a means to give Islanders universal suffrage (Personal Interview 1, 2015), and also to help modernize Newfoundland and the Cod Fishery (Bill 2). On the other, it was seen as detrimental to "home-grown Newfoundland [outport] culture" (Bill 2).

Obviously, with Confederation and the lack of acknowledgment of the Province's Aboriginal Peoples, there came consequences. These consequences are illustrated in the below depiction of a participant describing the effects of such ignorant oversights on his family's heritage. In this case, the Mi'kmaq family spoken of in the interview was not aware of their Aboriginality until the late twentieth

century, despite the participant's Grandmother being a "full-blooded" Mi'kmaq:

I had a phone call one day, I suppose it was from the Government, asking if I knew if I had any Aboriginal blood in me. And I said, no? Not as far as I know. Because back then, [at] home, it was like nobody thought they were Aboriginal and stuff like this, they just went ahead and done what had to be done to survive...Like the Oldman's (Participants Father's) situation; we didn't know he was Aboriginal! No!...you know?...and I guess the people themselves didn't even, I don't guess it even come in their mind that they were Aboriginal...and over the years they just went about life as usual, you know? (Personal Interview, 1, 2015).

This quotation suggests that the local Mi'kmaq adopted Western European practices as a mean for sustaining their own survival. However, through this process of assimilation via Confederation the Mi'kmaq were to be placed at an even greater disadvantage due to the lack of acclimation to land. According to Bodley, the most detrimental discourse to affect Aboriginal Peoples are those relating to land claim policies. Both O'Brien and Bodley concur that the implementation of a capitalistic system/ market-based system, will lead to the assimilation of Aboriginal populations simply because it does not keep with traditional practice and the relating notions of identity and sustainability. In this sense, groups adopt completely different lifeways as a means to maintain and pass along their culture without running into conflict with the dominating hegemonic body and/or colonizer.

In response to methods of forced assimilation via the displacement and dispossession of Aboriginals and Aboriginal land, post-colonialist movements have been steadily rising and gaining significance since the 1970s (Qalipu.ca). Twenty-one years after joining Confederation, Mi'kmaq groups began to define their identity, despite having no exclusive claims to land (Qalipu.ca). Like the Natick, many of the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq 'opted' to assimilate into the prevailing society, which in turn allowed them to maintain their historical 'place' within the said, now transformed, society. This redefinition of Mi'kmaq identity eventually constituted enough support via genealogical investigations and other presented documentation, that after approximately 40 years, federal recognition was achieved (Qalipu.ca).

Angela Robinson notes that "[a]t first glance, the formation of the [Qalipu First Nation]...can be seen as a positive step forward...However, as a landless band, its formation can be viewed as a form of state repression" whereby the state continues to delegate social and political order (Robinson 383). Bodley concurs with this notion; he states that forms of *indirect control* placed limits, like that of landlessness, on Aboriginal groups as means to continue the assimilation processes, and also to avoid complications over land claims (Bodley 75): "To complicate matters further, they must win allies in the dominant society"(Bodley 201) as a means to ensure group survival.

Unlike many groups, the Mi'kmaq of western Newfoundland have not had the opportunity to develop a strong sense of autonomy. Centuries of colonization and displacement have almost entirely engulfed their society. Over the past forty years the Mi'kmaq, in an attempt to piece together the fragmented Mi'kmaq culture and

lifeways, established local bands, which in turn supported members in attaining formal recognition in this decade. As one participant so aptly put it, “I don’t think that the Aboriginal people in Newfoundland needed to be told they were Aboriginal, but it was certainly nice to have the federal government recognize them as being Aboriginal...”(Personal interview, 2, 2015). People felt somewhat rectified with the 2011 agreement, even if they could claim no rights to hunting or fishing grounds.

In such instances where bands have no such land claims, disruptions to Aboriginal land—land that has been bought and paid for—are overlooked and viewed in congruence to other cases of non-Aboriginal land disputes. For example, one participant exclaimed that, “the provincial government is going after people that say that they own land and that if they have no papers to prove that they own the land, well, the government is pulling the land back”(Personal Interview, 1, 2015). In other words, the government is finding out who owns large amounts of property in and around the town of Stephenville, then requesting that these individuals produce proof of ownership. If they cannot produce such documentation, the Provincial Government is expropriating their land. The message to be gained is that the Province only deems land culturally significant if it is worked and tended to in a manner that is outlined as appropriate by the ruling hegemonic body. Once again, due to the absence of land claims, Aboriginals in this area are not able to tend their own property as they please. While this case is not limited to the Mi’kmaq population of Stephenville, dispossession and displacement does stand to remove what is left of the cultural lifeways of the Mi’kmaq people; as one participant correctly noted, “[b]eing [a landless band], you’re...definitely assimilated more so [than a nation that has previous and ongoing land claims]...and eventually your bloodline will run...”(Personal interview, 1, 2015).

Conclusion

I don’t think it’s feasible to create another reservation...to me that’s not feasible, we’re too far away from that now, ...but land claims is something that...can be pursued I think.

-Personal Interview, 2015.

Karl Marx wrote that, “England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating - the annihilation of the Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia.”(Marx,1). The same notion is mirrored in practices of the forceful assimilation of the Mi’kmaq populations residing the West Coast of Newfoundland. The desire to expand, modernize, and ultimately capitalize upon the island’s natural resources were viewed with little or no consideration of resident Aboriginal Peoples. Historically, Newfoundland Aboriginal groups and their colonizers have had a very complex relationship stemming back farther than the 15th century. For the purpose of this research, three historical occurrences within the history Newfoundland and the Newfoundland Mi’kmaq were analyzed in reference to theoretical frameworks pertaining to land grievances within colonialist, confederate, and post-colonialist discourses. These political processes consisted of the establishment of the HAFB, Newfoundland’s confederation with

Canada, and the development and formation of the Qalipu First Nation.

Six members of the Qalipu First nation were interviewed. In addition, a significant literature review of scholarly and peer reviewed sources was undertaken and additional primary documents were acquired via family archives. My findings yielded that, essentially, colonialist practices worked to displace Mi'kmaq residents from their land within a newly established market-economy. The HAFB can be seen in relation to the first formal instances of displacement and dispossession. The implementation of a market economy fueled other formal discussion and consideration, of Newfoundland's confederation with Canada in 1949. One of the most significant blows to Aboriginal peoples on the West Coast of Newfoundland was that Confederation undermined all Mi'kmaq peoples and alienated them from, and within, their own territory. Without claims to land the Mi'kmaq of the St. George's Bay and Port au Port Bay areas watched their homes and livelihoods be transformed into a modern, market-based, military town, unsympathetic to compromised Aboriginal lifeways.

Approximately twenty years after confederation that FNI would form, but it would be another forty years before any formal organization would be officially recognized. Even so, any and all "progress" was hampered by the federal government's insistence that the Qalipu First Nation become 'landless.' Once again, governments have ensured the assimilation of Aboriginal peoples by furthering acquisitions of valuable resources. These contradictory practices are common dealings within colonialist and post-colonialist regimes, however, upon interviewing members of FNI, they stated that land claims would be something to strive towards. It is critical to maintain and support the Aboriginal sociocultural practices that remain and to develop them as a means of maintaining the heritage of, not only the Aboriginal populations, but of Newfoundlanders and Newfoundland history as a whole.

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